

PRIDE AWARDS 2017

Category: Outstanding In-House Public Relations Team

Company: Bristol City Council

Number of staff employed - including executive / support staff - and annual public relations budget, showing areas directly under the control of the in house team:

Eight (rose to 10 from 04/2017, adding two Consultation roles).

£420,038 (core PR staff costs and systems: covering media relations, digital news, social media, publications and reputation management)

Business objectives and analysis of performance against budget over the past three years:

Established in June 2014, the team of subject matter experts lead work to protect and enhance the reputation of the Council and the city. The team actively works across the council to enable a planned, pro-active way of managing reputation.

Key measures of success:

- Achieve >80% average campaign success rate against evidenced delivery of outcomes embedded in SMART objectives
- Achieve an overarching positive sentiment in mainstream media coverage and online content, measured via media monitoring service
- Increase efficiency and decrease cost by joining up news distribution and publishing systems whilst increasing readership, social shares and interaction by >5% each year.

All of these key measures have been met or exceeded over the past three years; achieved within the budget envelope. Praised by the former Mayor as 'truly transformative work' in its success.

A brief overview of business / team strategy:

The strategy can be summed up as: 'Prevention is better than cure.'

The team has become embedded in the council's policy forming and decision-making. Cabinet reports now include PR advice alongside more traditional areas such as Legal and Finance. The team attend key strategic meetings such as Cabinet Member Briefings and Cabinet Agenda Conference, with an open-door invitation to advise weekly Strategic Leadership Team meetings.

The team's pro-active work is aligned to the council's Corporate Strategy and the team was closely involved in compiling this, working as part of the core delivery group.

Its focus on strategic, partnership and behaviour-change communications aims to manage demand, deliver challenging savings and keep people engaged and informed, whilst often preventing crisis situations and ensuring positive outcomes.

A summary of commitment to CPD and professionalism:

- The Head of Service became a Chartered Practitioner in November 2015 and is a member of the CIPR Local Public Services Committee.
- All team members belong to the CIPR, complete CPD and attend one or more CIPR workshops each year. All have become Accredited Practitioners, set annual development plans and part-fund membership.
- Annual CIPR team workshop (past examples include Social Media and Influencing and Negotiating Skills) and separate away-day focusing on strategy, ethics, team-building and overcoming challenges.
- The team operates a free-to-use PR library in both physical and digital formats. Team meetings are used to share learnings from formal training. We also operate shadowing of other council professionals and mentoring.

The result is a high-performing service which often attracts feedback such as this from then-Chief Executive Stephen Hughes:

“Thanks to you and your team for managing this process so smoothly. I know it's the day job, but it is always done so calmly, efficiently and professionally which means we can just rely on you to get the job done. Sometimes such ruthless efficiency and capability goes unnoticed and not celebrated sufficiently as we just take it for granted that's the way it will be. So really well done.”

A summary of recent outstanding achievements:

- Working alongside Corporate Communications colleagues we co-led a campaign to raise awareness of the West of England Mayoral Election. This led to the second highest national turnout (and the highest where there was not also a local election), over 8,500 additional voter registrations (1,454 of which can be directly linked to a campaign Thunderclap), 13.5k web visitors, 6.5k Twitter engagements and 1.7k organic Facebook engagements, along with 80+ items of local and national media coverage.
- Supporting Bristol's presence (as European Green Capital 2015) at the global Paris climate talks (COP21). Bristol reached up to 18.2m people via news media (including national and international TV coverage in the UK, France and Canada, with daily blogs in Huffington Post); 90% positivity in tone, 10% neutral. Reached a maximum of 104,000 views via social media, with 1,086 active engagements.
- Developed and launched a Bristol city-brand alongside Corporate Communications. Including a brand toolkit and expansive cross-sector development and take-up.
- Extensive local, national and international coverage of 'One Tree Per Child' project. Reach of over 4m social accounts, including a top-read story on The Guardian website 'liked' over 1,200 times and major features on national BBC Breakfast and Sky broadcasts.

- Increased Twitter followers by 421%; from 19,900 (May 2014) to 83,820 (June 2017).

A summary of a campaign you are particularly proud of, including details of the brief, objectives, strategy, tactics, outputs, outcomes and budget:

Brief:

Lead PR for publication of a Serious Case Review (SCR) in to Operation Brooke, one of country's largest prosecutions of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) offences.

Objectives, Strategy and Tactics:

Strategy focused on safeguarding victims, raising awareness of CSE, making the voices of young people heard and enabling multi-agency risk assessment.

Supporting objectives:

1. Engage with victims and families to explain the process and support available no later than two weeks before publication.
2. Enable agencies to engage with key figures in the community and ensure that they are confidentially informed about the publication, findings and organisational responses before media reporting.
3. Arrange and deliver a multi-agency press conference on Thursday 24 March, including professional media training for the Board Chair by Friday 18 March, and a single multi-agency written response for distribution.
4. Achieve a balanced tone in at least 80% of mainstream media reporting.
5. Minimise impact of reporting on victims, families and communities by encouraging a single set of media reporting in one planned timescale.

We chaired a multi-agency communications sub-group and through this we amplified the voice of the victims – building their experience and advice on keeping young people safe into our communication. We considered the need to protect victim identities and issues of community cohesion given the likely media emphasis on the ethnicity of offenders.

Outputs:

- Advance tailored stakeholder engagement leading up to a single multi-agency press conference. We analysed stakeholders and created a clear hierarchy of needs, informing what actions were taken,
- Coordinated multi-agency press conference; giving notice to national, trade and regional outlets and allowing time for detailed scrutiny of the report,
- The report publication was supported with a follow-up multi-agency campaign to raise awareness of CSE.

Outcomes:

Mixed-method evaluation was undertaken, including media analysis, partner interviews and follow-up meetings.

- All of the aims and objectives set out in the plan were fulfilled,
- No safeguarding incidents or instances of violence or other major criminality,

- High levels of accuracy and 80% of reporting carrying victims' advice to others,
- Reporting compared favourably with that experienced in other areas with similar cases,
- All stakeholders felt suitably informed,
- Invited to present to the national Association of Independent Local Safeguarding Children Board Chairs conference on best-practice around SCR publication.

Budget:

£2,000 staff time recharged to Bristol Safeguarding Children Board

£1,000 for venue hire